

From the
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The Musée Rosette Rochon

By Philip Gilmore, Project Officer
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Along with her Creole family of color, a young Rosette Rochon migrated from British-occupied Mobile to New Orleans shortly after her father died in 1771. As a free woman of color living in this diverse milieu, Rochon went on to become a very successful and astute businesswoman buying and selling mortgages, loaning money at interest, and operating a grocery store. In addition, she owned and rented property and was one of the first property owners to develop the new suburb of Faubourg Marigny. Most of her buildings are long-gone, but one of the remaining two is an elegant and early 19th-century Creole cottage at 1515 Pauger St. Built in the style of a transitional Greek Revival, it is simple yet refined and stands as a remarkable testament to her inspiring legacy.

"[Free persons of color] were integrated with their culture and at least from our perspective in time, they personified grace, symmetry and charm." Museum owner Don Richmond sees this unique historical period as "a time when everything came together...music, architecture, cuisine, fashion, manners, all things that we find interesting from our viewpoint." He explains that to "many of the tourists who come here...the things that they find captivating about New Orleans culture are attributable to these people in part."

Free people of color left an indelible mark on the craft trades and con-

tributed to the construction of much of the city's historic architectural stock during the early and mid-19th century. One way of cultivating a true appreciation for this heritage is to observe and explore this city's distinctive cache of vernacular historic neighborhoods. Well represented as masons, woodworkers and plasterers, these artisans lent their superb craftsmanship to the city's building stock, leaving behind a treasure trove of architectural gems that are richly celebrated as part of New Orleans' unique heritage.

The Building

Owner Don Richmond explains that Rochon commissioned construction of the building at 1515 Pauger St. around 1815. However, the exact date of its construction is difficult to pinpoint



Photo by Tracy Nelson

It was filthy, it was rotten, it was sordid, it was depressing." Richmond adds laughing, "The only good thing I can say about it is that it was a romantic ruin."

because, even after extensive research, a record of the building contract was never found.

Unfortunately, as is so often the case with blighted historic properties in New Orleans, the building was in shambles when Richmond purchased the cottage in 1984. Almost a century of neglect had wreaked havoc on the building's structural integrity and left the roof, windows, plaster and brick-between-post walls to decay. Lack of



Photo by Philip Gilmore



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Don Richmond is the owner of the building and director of the Musée Rosette Rochon located at 1515 Pauger St. in the Faubourg Marigny. His non-profit foundation honors the life and contributions of Afro-Creole and Afro-American people living in Post-Colonial and Antebellum New Orleans.



Photo by Philip Gilmore

Original mantel.

weatherization led to systemic moisture problems, sowing the seeds for termite infestation and further damage.

In 2007, this building received a grant from the Historic Building Recovery Grant Program to repair damage from Hurricane Katrina. The grant money went towards the repair of shiplap siding on the riverside elevation. It also covered work on some of the rear façade weatherboards, floors, gutters, doors, locks, windows and brick piers.

Richmond hopes that the museum will function as both a cultural and educational facility while, in effect, becoming a "living part of the community." He envisions the museum sponsoring craft demonstrations and lectures centered on the life of free people of color. Richmond believes that it is "extremely important that children in school learn about their



Art courtesy of Andrew L. Hopkins

This painting is an artistic rendering of an anonymous free woman of color from New Orleans in the early 19th century.

heritage. They can learn a certain amount from books... but it's not like going and seeing the real thing and being involved in some manner."

To arrange a tour and/or donate funds to help restore this hidden gem of New Orleans, call Don Richmond

at (504) 947-7673 or visit the Musée Rosette Rochon Web site at <http://www.rosetterrochon.com>.

For further reading and research

- 1) Musée Rosette Rochon: A Historic New Orleans House Museum Honoring the Accomplishments of Free People of Color. Web site, <http://www.rosetterrochon.com/> (Accessed February 28, 2009)
- 2) Vlach, John Michael. Raised to the Trade: Creole Building Arts of New Orleans (Teacher's Manual). Web site, <http://www.noma.org/educationguides/CreoleBuildArt.pdf>
- 3) Friends of the Cabildo. *New Orleans Architecture Volume IV: The Creole Faubourgs*. Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Company, 1996.
- 4) Hobratsch, Ben Melvin. *Creole Angel: The Self Identity of the Free People of Color of Antebellum New Orleans*. Web site, <http://digital.library.unt.edu/permalink/meta-dc-5369:1>